

Transformational Leadership And Employee Career Satisfaction: The Mediating Role Of Self-Efficacy And Career Commitment

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Abstract

This study examines how transformational leadership influences teacher career satisfaction, with self-efficacy and career commitment as mediators. Using a cross-sectional design, 200 JHS/SHS teachers across public and private sector educational institutions in Ghana completed validated scales. Regression and bootstrapped mediation analysis tested the hypotheses. Transformational leadership showed a positive total effect on career satisfaction ($\beta = .20, p < .01$). It was strongly related to self-efficacy ($\beta = .44, p < .001$) and career commitment ($\beta = .34, p < .001$). Both mediators transmitted significant indirect effects: self-efficacy = .25, 95%; career commitment = .27, 95%. The direct effect became non-significant after including mediators, indicating full mediation. Findings extend leadership theory by linking TL to long-term career outcomes through motivational and career-based mechanisms. Practically, the study highlights the need for leadership development that builds teacher confidence and career commitment, especially in education. This clarifies the psychological pathways through which TL promotes subjective career success.

Keywords: Transformational leadership; Career satisfaction; Self-efficacy; Career commitment; Mediation

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I. Introduction

Employee career satisfaction defined as the degree to which employees positively appraise career progression, accomplishment and future potential has become a key outcome in modern human resource and organizational research as it predicts retention, career mobility, intrinsic motivation for skill acquisition and overall organizational performance (Huo, 2021). Recent scholarship (Oubibi et al., 2022; Karimi, Rezaei & Khanlari, 2023) emphasizes that career satisfaction is distinct from job satisfaction: it reflects longer-term evaluations of career trajectories and aspirations rather than immediate work-related affect and therefore responds to leadership practices that shape employees' perceived career resources and psychological capital.

The transformational leadership style, which is comprised of inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and idealized influence, has been consistently associated with positive employee outcomes like job satisfaction, organizational commitment and performance (Jiatong, Wang, & Li, 2022). Contemporary studies (Chen, Ding, & Li, 2021; Arman et al., 2019) demonstrate that transformational leaders' influence on their followers is not only achieved by direct behavioral means but also by influencing followers' psychological states and perceptions of growth opportunities.

Two psychological constructs, specifically, self-efficacy and career commitment, are particularly likely to explain a transformational leaders' impact on employees' career-level outcomes. Self-efficacy, defined as an individuals' beliefs in their ability to perform tasks and achieve goals, serves as a proximal motivational resource that translates signals of leadership (such as expectations, developmental support) into increased goal dedication, perseverance and skill acquisition (Bandura, 2018; Javed et al., 2021). Different studies (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2015; Sánchez Rosas et al., 2023) have shown that transformational leadership increases the employee's self-efficacy, which increases adaptive work behavior and subjective indicators of success.

Career commitment is the degree of identification with and attachment to one's chosen occupation or career and reflects the motivational willingness to invest time and effort in career development over a long period (Huo, 2021). Research (Singh, 2022; Zhao et al., 2024) indicates that organizational factors such as perceived career growth opportunities, supporting leadership and passion for work affect career commitment, which in turn leads to career satisfaction and subjective career success. Because transformational leaders tend to create climates that emphasize growth and meaningful work, they are in a good position to enhance career commitment and thus enhance employee career satisfaction.

Although previous studies (Murphy & Anderson, 2020; Chen, Ding, & Li, 2021; Arman et al., 2019) have assessed the relationship between transformational leadership and job-related attitudes and performance, there are still several important gaps in the literature. First, there is a dearth of empirical research directly testing

the effects of transformational leadership on career satisfaction (as opposed to job satisfaction), which leaves open the question of whether leadership affects more aspirational and long-term evaluations in the same manner that it affects immediate job attitudes. Second, whereas self-efficacy and career commitment have separately been shown (Chughtai, 2018; Chen et al., 2021; Singh, 2022) to mediate various leadership-outcome relationships, few studies have considered both together in one integrative model for how transformational leaders co-develop individual beliefs (self-efficacy) and sustained occupational attachment (career commitment) to achieve career satisfaction. It is important to include both mediators in a holistic approach because self-efficacy and career commitment operate at different levels, one at a more proximal cognitive level and the other at an identity-based level, more oriented towards the future. As such, they can be complementary in explaining the effects of leadership.

Based on this theoretical and empirical foundation, the present study explores whether transformational leadership predicts employee career satisfaction and tests the mediating roles of (a) self-efficacy and (b) career commitment. By focusing on career satisfaction as the outcome, and by modeling both a proximal psychological mechanism (self-efficacy) and a longer-term vocational attachment process (career commitment), this study aims to (1) clarify the pathways through which transformational leaders influence employees' career evaluations and (2) extend leadership research by integrating motivational and career-development perspectives. These findings have practical implications for organizations that wish to retain and develop talent: evidence that leadership can influence career satisfaction via enhanced self-efficacy and career attachment would indicate the need for specific leadership development and career-support practices.

In the sections below we summarize the relevant literature, deduce testable hypotheses and describe a quantitative empirical design in order to test the proposed mediation model. By integrating theoretical developments with empirical evidence, the paper is a contemporary addition to leadership and career literature and includes practical implications for practitioners who want to link leadership practice to the long-term career outcomes of employees.

II. Theoretical Background And Hypotheses

Transformational Leadership and Employee Career Satisfaction

Transformational leadership (TL) is a leadership style that has been widely recognized as one of the most important leadership styles in predicting employee attitudes and behaviors. Based on the study of Bass and Avolio (1990), transformational leadership includes four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Jiatong, Wang, & Li, 2022). These behaviors, which nurture trust, intrinsic motivation and purpose among employees, not only have an impact on employees' immediate job satisfaction but also on their overall career judgments (Lee & Hidayat, 2018).

Career satisfaction is an individual's subjective assessment of their career achievements, development and prospects (Huo, 2021). It goes beyond the day-to-day experience of work and includes long-term perceptions of growth and fulfillment. Transformational leadership is particularly important in influencing such perceptions, as they are able to create a clear vision of the future, identify individual strengths, and provide career development opportunities (Chen, Ding, & Li, 2021). Through these means, employees' confidence in their professional journey is increased, as is their sense of alignment between individual purposes and organizational goals.

Transformational leadership is positively correlated with career accomplishments as indicated by empirical studies (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2015; Sánchez Rosas et al., 2023; Agrawal & Pradhan, 2024). Employees who consider their leaders to be transformational report higher levels of satisfaction in terms of career advancement opportunities and long-term growth prospects (Agrawal & Pradhan, 2024). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: Transformational leadership significantly influences employee career satisfaction.

Transformational Leadership and Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, which is the belief of an individual in his or her ability to organize and carry out the actions needed to reach a desired result (Bandura, 2018), is one of the key mechanisms through which leadership affects the behavior of employees. Transformational leaders boost self-efficacy through challenging yet achievable goal setting, feedback and innovative problem solving (Flageolle, 2024). Through individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation, such leaders help employees to re-interpret challenges as opportunities, thus increasing their confidence in dealing with complicated work situations (Hariri et al., 2024).

Recent evidence from studies (Asada et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Sánchez Rosas et al., 2023) has suggested that self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and work outcomes like creativity, engagement and performance. Ahsan (2025) pointed out that leaders who express high expectations and offer assistance in career development establish an environment that is conducive to learning and mastery which augurs well for the employees' belief in their competence. Thus, it is anticipated that transformational leadership will contribute to higher levels of self-efficacy among employees, which in turn will contribute to career-related outcomes. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Transformational leadership significantly influences employee self-efficacy.

Transformational Leadership and Career Commitment

Career commitment is the level of attachment, identification and dedication to work that an individual has regarding his or her chosen career (Huo, 2021). It is a long-term psychological relationship that affects perseverance, hard work and desire to pursue professional goals over the long haul, regardless of setbacks. Transformational leaders foster career commitment by giving the employees a shared purpose and by connecting individual goals with the organization's mission (Huo, 2021).

Through mentoring, feedback and recognition, transformational leaders enable employees to see their work as meaningful and their careers as personally fulfilling (Ahsan, 2025). The psychosocial support of such leaders creates intrinsic motivation and increases vocational attachment. As a result, employees become more dedicated towards their professional development and career continuity (Singh, 2022).

H3: Transformational leadership significantly influences employee career commitment.

The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy and Career Commitment

While transformational leadership is supposed to have a direct influence on career satisfaction, its impacts can be better explained by mediating psychological factors. Self-efficacy is a motivational mediator operating at the proximal level (translating leader behavior into confidence and persistence), whereas the career commitment operates as a motivational mediator at the distal level (reflecting multiple instances of engagement with one's career) (Bandura, 2018; Karimi et al., 2023).

Transformational leaders' individualized consideration and inspirational motivation foster employees' self-efficacy so that employees can take initiative in seeking developmental opportunities. Researchers found that employees who have high self-efficacy have a higher likelihood of having positive perceptions of career progression and report greater satisfaction (Ran & Cinamon, 2023). For example, the ability of transformational leaders to provide meaning and purpose reinforces employee dedication to their chosen career path. Employees who are devoted feel a greater sense of accomplishment and career development satisfaction in the long run (Ahmed, 2019).

There is empirical support for this dual mediating mechanism (Othman & Khrais, 2022; Khan et al., 2023; Ozdemir et al., 2024), where psychological empowerment mechanisms tend to mediate the impact of transformational leadership on career and work-related outcomes. Combining these results, the current study proposed a sequential mediation model where transformational leadership influences self-efficacy and career commitment which, in turn, positively influence career satisfaction.

H4a: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee career satisfaction.

H4b: Career commitment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee career satisfaction.

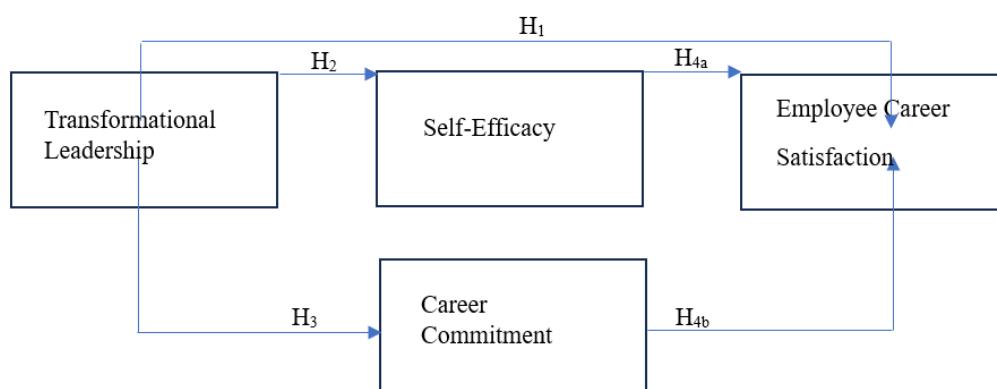


Figure 1: The conceptual model of the relationship between transformational leadership, self-efficacy, career commitment and employee career satisfaction.

III. Methodology

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate relationships between transformational leadership, self-efficacy, career commitment and employee career satisfaction. The design was appropriate because it gave the ability to test mediation effects and evaluate the hypothesized relationships among the study variables at one point in time (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Primary data was collected by a survey

targeting employees of educational institutions and allowing the generalization of results in an organizational context. The target population was full-time employees (teachers) in public and private sector educational institutions in Ghana. The sample size for this study was based on the use of both statistical and practical considerations that were suitable for mediation regression analysis. According to Cohen (2016), a minimum of 26 participants is required to detect a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.35$) with three predictors at a statistical power of 0.80 and a 5% level of significance in a standard multiple regression model. However, larger sample sizes are needed in mediation models in general to produce reliable parameter estimates and bootstrap confidence intervals for indirect effects (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007; Hayes, 2017). In light of the fact that the present study is based on latent constructs measured by multi-item scales and given the complexity of the mediation paths, a more conservative and robust sample size was considered appropriate. Based on recommendations by Kline (2023) and Wolf et al. (2013), a minimum of 200 participants was aimed to obtain sufficient statistical power, model stability and generalizability.

Data was gathered through an online survey of teachers from different education institutions. Based on a response rate for online questionnaires around 50% (Nulty, 2008), a total of 400 teachers were invited to complete the questionnaire in order to attain the objective of 200 valid responses. This sample size was deemed large enough to capture the effects of interest, reduce the possibility of estimating error and allow for non-responses or incomplete questionnaires. Although efforts were made to obtain a diverse sample of teachers, participation in the online survey was voluntary, which may have contributed to differences in response rates across demographic groups, including gender. A non-probability sampling approach was employed for participant recruitment. Teachers from public and private educational institutions were invited to participate in an online survey during the data collection period. Participation was voluntary, and respondents completed the questionnaire based on their willingness and availability. Although efforts were made to obtain responses from teachers across different educational settings and levels, the study did not employ random selection procedures. Consequently, the sample should be regarded as a convenience sample rather than a probability-based sample. The data were collected during a period of two months, specifically from October to November 2025. All constructs were assessed using validated and proven scales from past studies. Answers were provided on a five-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

- Transformational Leadership was measured with the 21-item Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) from Bass and Avolio (1995) and its four subscales: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.
- Self-Efficacy was measured with the General Self-Efficacy Scale by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) which is made up of 10 items measuring a belief in one's ability to cope with challenging situations.
- Career Commitment was assessed by using the Career Commitment Scale of Blau (2009) which is made up of 8 items that measure psychological attachment of individuals to their careers.
- Employee Career Satisfaction was measured using the 5-item scale developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990) which measured career satisfaction towards career growth, progression and goal fulfillment.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the characteristics of the study variables, while Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed to examine relationships among the constructs. Multiple regression analyses were subsequently conducted to test the direct effects proposed in the study. The mediating effects of self-efficacy and career commitment were examined using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples, following the recommendations of Hayes (2017). Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5% level. However, because self-efficacy and career commitment are conceptually and empirically related constructs, future studies may benefit from employing parallel mediation models that estimate their unique indirect effects simultaneously.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Values equal to or greater than 0.70 were considered indicative of satisfactory reliability (Hair et al., 2014).

IV. Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The sample was made up of 200 respondents who were selected in both public and private institutions of learning. In terms of gender, a majority of the participants were men (70%), whilst 30% of the sample comprised of women. This distribution indicates a noticeable gender imbalance within the study sample and should be considered when interpreting the findings and their generalisability to broader teacher populations. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were between 20 to 29 years (36%) and 40-49 years (34%), which indicates that a great proportion of the respondents are in their working age.

Concerning the type of institution, the majority of the respondents (66%) work in public institutions. Further, concerning the level of institution taught, respondents were predominantly from tertiary (42%) and junior high school levels (40%). The sample was balanced in terms of teaching experience, with teachers with less than

five years teaching experience making up 36% of the sample, whilst those with over 15 years of experience constituted 26% of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 200)*

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	140	70
	Female	60	30
Age	20–29 years	72	36
	30–39 years	32	16
	40–49 years	68	34
	50 years and above	28	14
Type of Institution	Public	132	66
	Private	68	34
Level of Institution Taught	Tertiary	84	42
	Primary	36	18
	Junior High	80	40
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	72	36
	5–10 years	28	14
	11–15 years	48	24
	Above 15 years	52	26

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients and correlations of the variables in the study. The constructs showed high internal consistency, with Cronbach alpha values surpassing the recommended Cronbach alpha of 0.7, which indicated satisfactory reliability.

Transformational leadership recorded a moderate to high mean score ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.01$), suggesting that respondents generally perceived their leaders as exhibiting transformational behaviors. Self-efficacy ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.83$) and career commitment ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.73$) showed relatively high mean values, indicating strong confidence in personal capabilities and attachment to one's career. Career satisfaction also recorded a positive mean level ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.93$).

Correlation analysis revealed that transformational leadership was positively associated with self-efficacy, career commitment and career satisfaction. In addition, self-efficacy and career commitment were strongly and positively related to career satisfaction.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations (N = 200)

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	1	2	3	4
Transformational Leadership	3.53	1.01	0.97	—			
Self-Efficacy	3.89	0.83	0.96	.44**	—		
Career Commitment	3.94	0.73	0.90	.34**	.71**	—	
Career Satisfaction	3.60	0.93	0.93	.20**	.56**	.79**	—

1-Transformational leadership; 2- Self-efficacy; 3- Career commitment; 4- Career satisfaction

The correlation analysis further revealed a strong positive association between self-efficacy and career commitment ($r = .71$, $p < .01$), indicating substantial overlap between the two mediating constructs. Consequently, the indirect effects reported in subsequent analyses should be interpreted as separate mediation estimates rather than unique effects controlling for the influence of the alternative mediator.

3.0 Hypothesis Testing

H₁: Transformational leadership significantly influences employee career satisfaction.

The results (Table 3) indicate that transformational leadership was positively and significantly related to career satisfaction ($\beta = .20$, $SE = .06$, $t = 3.02$, $p < .01$). Transformational leadership explained approximately 4% of the variance in career satisfaction ($R^2 = .04$). Although statistically significant, the magnitude of the effect was relatively modest, suggesting that transformational leadership accounts for only a small proportion of employees' career satisfaction. These results are in tandem with Hypothesis 1, which states that employees who perceive higher levels of transformational leadership report greater career satisfaction.

H2: Transformational leadership significantly influences employee self-efficacy.

Transformational leadership showed a significant positive effect on self-efficacy ($\beta = .44$, $SE = .06$, $t = 7.03$, $p < .001$). The model accounted for approximately 19% of the variance in self-efficacy ($R^2 = .19$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported, indicating that transformational leadership enhances employees' confidence in their abilities.

H3: Transformational leadership significantly influences employee career commitment.

The results revealed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = .34$, $SE = .07$, $t = 5.07$, $p < .001$). Transformational leadership explained about 12% of the variance in career commitment ($R^2 = .12$). Accordingly, Hypothesis 3 was supported, demonstrating that transformational leadership fosters stronger commitment to one's career.

The mediation analyses were conducted separately for self-efficacy and career commitment. Therefore, the reported indirect effects represent the individual explanatory role of each mediator and should not be interpreted as additive effects within a single integrated mediation model.

H4a: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee career satisfaction.

Mediation analyses were conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples, as recommended for indirect effect testing in reputable journals. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were used to assess the significance of indirect effects.

The indirect effect of transformational leadership on career satisfaction through self-efficacy was positive and statistically significant (indirect effect = .25, 95% CI [.14, .38]). Because the confidence interval did not include zero, the mediation effect was supported. These results provide support for Hypothesis 4a. The indirect effect of transformational leadership on career satisfaction through self-efficacy was significant. However, the direct effect of transformational leadership on career satisfaction became negative and non-significant after controlling for self-efficacy ($\beta = -.05$, $p > .05$). This pattern indicates inconsistent mediation, suggesting that transformational leadership influences career satisfaction primarily through its positive effect on employees' self-efficacy rather than through a direct positive effect.

H4b: Career commitment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee career satisfaction.

The mediating role of career commitment was also examined. Results from the bootstrapping analysis showed a significant indirect effect of transformational leadership on career satisfaction via career commitment (indirect effect = .27, 95% CI [.16, .41]). The confidence interval excluded zero, confirming the presence of mediation. Thus, Hypothesis 4b was supported. The direct effect of transformational leadership on career satisfaction became negative and non-significant after controlling for career commitment ($\beta = -.07$, $p > .05$). The findings therefore indicate an inconsistent mediation pattern, whereby transformational leadership contributes to career satisfaction primarily through strengthening employees' career commitment.

Table 3: Summary of Direct and Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Path	β / Effect	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Result
H1	TL → Career Satisfaction (Total Effect, c)	.20	3.02	< .01	—	Supported
H2	TL → Self-Efficacy	.44	7.03	< .001	—	Supported
H3	TL → Career Commitment	.34	5.07	< .001	—	Supported
H4a	TL → Career Satisfaction (Direct Effect, c' controlling for Self-Efficacy)	-.05	-0.82	> .05	[-.17, .07]	Not Significant
H4a	TL → Self-Efficacy → Career Satisfaction (Indirect Effect)	.25	—	—	[.14, .38]	Supported
H4b	TL → Career Satisfaction (Direct Effect, c' controlling for Career Commitment)	-.07	-1.04	> .05	[-.20, .06]	Not Significant
H4b	TL → Career Commitment → Career Satisfaction (Indirect Effect)	.27	—	—	[.16, .41]	Supported

Note: TL = Transformational Leadership; c = total effect; c' = direct effect after controlling for the mediator. The significant indirect effects together with negative and non-significant direct effects indicate an inconsistent mediation pattern, also referred to as suppression mediation. This suggests that transformational leadership influences career satisfaction primarily through self-efficacy and career commitment rather than through a direct positive effect.

V. Discussion

1.0 Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Relationships

The descriptive statistics demonstrate that all study variables exhibited satisfactory internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. These findings indicate that the measurement instruments were reliable and appropriate for assessing transformational leadership, self-efficacy, career commitment and career satisfaction. Transformational leadership (TL) demonstrated a moderate to high mean ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.01$), which indicates that the sample participants tended to perceive leaders as having transformational behaviors. The self-efficacy ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.83$) and career commitment ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.73$) levels were also high, implying that employees are not only confident about their abilities but also express a high level of commitment to their careers. There was also a positive orientation, illustrated by career satisfaction ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.93$).

Correlation results indicated that transformational leadership had a significant positive correlation with self-efficacy, career commitment and career satisfaction. In line with the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), transformational leadership appears to enrich employees' beliefs about their capabilities (self-efficacy) through mechanisms of motivational support and role modeling, fostering stronger career attachment and satisfaction. This is in tandem with foundational leadership theory that successful leaders shape both cognitive appraisals and affective attitudes of followers (Boyar et al., 2023).

Interestingly, self-efficacy and career commitment correlated more strongly with career satisfaction than transformational leadership alone, which indicates that the internal psychological resources and professional attachments of employees can be viewed as proximal predictors of satisfaction. This is consistent with the study by Huang et al. (2025) which identified psychological and contextual mediators as determinants explaining a larger portion of the variance in employee outcomes, as compared to the direct leadership effects.

The findings of the research are consistent with the findings of Prochazka et al. (2017), Meria et al. (2022) and Jeong and Jeong (2025), who concluded that transformational leadership is positively correlated with self-efficacy, and works of Wulandari et al. (2023) and Raza and Yousufi (2023), who have also found that transformational leadership and career commitment are positively correlated. Similarly, studies by Chen et al. (2021) and Raza and Yousufi (2023), also discovered that there exists a positive relationship between transformational leadership and career satisfaction, which is consistent with the results of the current study. The findings are also in concurrence with those of Schultheiss et al. (2023) and Tresi and Mihelič (2023), which found that self-efficacy and career commitment has a strong, positive correlation with career satisfaction.

2.0 Hypothesis Testing

H₁: Transformational leadership significantly influences employee career satisfaction.

Transformational leadership demonstrated a positive and statistically significant relationship with career satisfaction. However, the magnitude of this relationship was relatively modest, with transformational leadership accounting for only 4% of the variance in career satisfaction. This suggests that although leadership contributes to employees' career evaluations, other personal, organisational and career-related factors are likely to play a more substantial role. This is in tandem with existing literature which demonstrates a positive significant relationship between transformational leadership and career satisfaction outcomes. For instance, Chen et al. (2021) and Hilton et al. (2023) discovered that transformational leadership has a positive significant impact on career satisfaction, which aligns with the current research. Nonetheless, Raza and Yousufi (2023) established that despite the relationship between transformational leadership and empowerment as well as organisational commitment of workers being significant, that between transformational leadership and career satisfaction is not significant.

Further, research (Chen et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2023; Almeer et al., 2025) suggests that the direct effects of transformational leadership on satisfaction can fluctuate depending on contextual moderators (example: job design, psychological empowerment), moderating the strength of these relationships. The relatively small effect size observed in the present study suggests that transformational leadership should not be viewed as a dominant predictor of career satisfaction. Rather, leadership appears to function as one of several contextual influences that shape employees' long-term career experiences.

H₂: Transformational leadership significantly influences employee self-efficacy.

Transformational leadership had a strong, positive and statistically significant effect on self-efficacy ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .19$), consistent with the literature (Karimi et al., 2023; Ni et al., 2025; Utomo et al., 2025). This result aligns with recent empirical studies (Karimi et al., 2023; Ni et al., 2025; Utomo et al., 2025), which have shown that leaders who define an inspiring vision, intellectually stimulate and offer personalized feedback, positively influence the confidence of employees in coping with complex working environments and overcoming challenges.

However, studies also indicate that such a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and self-efficacy might not be uniform in different situations. For example, studies like Fan (2023) and

Van et al. (2024) confirm that transformational leadership positively affects self-efficacy in both occupational and cultural contexts, whilst Bai (2025) and Ni et al. (2025) identify interaction effects in which self-efficacy also operates as a moderating variable in leadership–outcome relationships. Specifically, Bai (2025) demonstrates that the positive impact of transformational leadership on knowledge sharing is significantly stronger among employees with the higher levels of self-efficacy, which implies that the confidence that people have in their abilities can either enhance or weaken the effectiveness of leadership behaviours. These results indicate possible boundary conditions, suggesting that transformational leadership can be most effective when it has supportive psychological mechanisms like high self-efficacy behind it and does not have a uniform effect on all employees.

H₃: Transformational leadership significantly influences employee career commitment.

Transformational leadership also showed a positive and significant effect on career commitment of employees ($\beta=.34$, $p<.001$; $R^2=.12$). This observation indicates that transformational leaders are essential in enhancing long-term psychological commitment of employees to their career of choice by developing an exciting vision, instilling a sense of meaning in work and stimulating personal development. Inspirational motivation and individualized consideration are some of the behaviors that transformational leaders use to make employees feel that their careers are not just consistent with tasks but are also intentional paths towards the larger organizational and career objectives (Eduzor, 2024).

This result is consistent with career development and social exchange theories, which posit that employees are more likely to commit to their careers when they experience leadership that signals support, recognition and investment in their future development (Wang et al., 2025). By offering mentoring, challenging assignments and developmental feedback, transformational leaders reinforce employees' beliefs that their organization provides opportunities for skill acquisition and career advancement, thereby strengthening career-related commitment (Sarwar et al., 2025).

The current results are consistent with recent empirical research in different settings. An example is that Wulandari et al. (2023) found that there is a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and career commitment among employees in an organization that is high paced, whereas Raza and Yousufi (2023) also state that transformational leadership increases the commitment of employees through creation of trust, motivation and perceived career support. The convergence of evidence across cultural and occupational contexts reinforces the generalizability of the transformational leadership–career commitment relationship and underscores its relevance in both developed and emerging economies.

Nevertheless, the small predictive power of the model ($R^2=.12$) suggests that, although transformational leadership does indeed play a decent predictive role in career commitment, other elements like career self-efficacy, organizational career management practices and perceived employability are also likely to influence the long-term career attachment of employees.

H_{4a}: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee career satisfaction.

The mediation analysis revealed an inconsistent mediation pattern. Although transformational leadership demonstrated a positive total effect on career satisfaction, the indirect effect through self-efficacy exceeded the magnitude of the total effect. Furthermore, the direct effect became negative and statistically non-significant after self-efficacy was introduced into the model. This finding suggests that transformational leadership enhances career satisfaction primarily by strengthening employees' confidence in their capabilities. In other words, self-efficacy serves as a key explanatory mechanism through which transformational leadership translates into positive career evaluations. Such inconsistent mediation is consistent with Social Cognitive Theory, which suggests that leadership behaviours influence employee outcomes largely through cognitive mechanisms such as efficacy beliefs.

The bootstrapping analysis also shows that self-efficacy has a significant mediation effect between the transformational leadership and the employee career satisfaction (indirect effect $=.25$, 95% CI $[.14, .38]$). The confidence interval does not include zero, which proves that the indirect effect is robust and indicates that transformational leadership contributes to increased career satisfaction partially because it strengthens the beliefs of employees, that they can deal with the challenges they face in their careers successfully. The presence of inconsistent mediation indicates that transformational leadership alone may not be sufficient to enhance career satisfaction unless it simultaneously strengthens employees' confidence in their ability to manage career challenges successfully.

This finding is consistent with the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) which alludes that self-efficacy predetermines how people evaluate their experiences, define their goals and measure their progress (Damayanti et al., 2022). Transformational leaders foster self-efficacy by adopting behaviors such as individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation, which are important contributors to efficacy beliefs (Khan, 2025). The more employees establish confidence in their skills and their level of career

management, the greater the chances of positive career-related affect, the perception of obstacles as something that can be overcome and consequently higher levels of career satisfaction (Yildiz et al., 2024).

This finding is empirically consistent with recent empirical studies (Bai, 2025; Safrizal et al., 2020) that have established that self-efficacy is a critical resource in psychology that relates leadership to employee well-being and satisfaction outcomes. Although previous literature (Bai, 2025; Safrizal et al., 2020) has determined direct links between transformational leadership and career satisfaction, the current result provides a clear view of how this relationship takes place by revealing that leadership has a role in promoting internal belief systems, which enhances external support or organizational conditions. This goes to show how critical it is to consider the cognitive and motivational processes of employees in analyzing the effectiveness of leadership.

It should be noted that self-efficacy and career commitment demonstrated a strong positive correlation. As a result, some overlap may exist between the indirect effects estimated for the two mediators. Future studies should employ parallel mediation models to determine the unique explanatory contribution of self-efficacy after accounting for career commitment and vice versa.

H4b: Career commitment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee career satisfaction.

The findings demonstrate an inconsistent mediation pattern involving career commitment. Although transformational leadership exhibited a positive total effect on career satisfaction, the indirect effect through career commitment exceeded the total effect, while the direct effect became negative and statistically non-significant. This suggests that transformational leadership contributes to career satisfaction mainly by increasing employees' commitment to their chosen careers. Employees who develop stronger identification with and attachment to their careers are more likely to evaluate their career progress positively and experience greater satisfaction.

Theoretically, this finding is consistent with the Commitment Theory and the Social Exchange approaches that highlight that employees reciprocate supportive and development-oriented leadership with deeper affective and normative bonds. Through inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, transformational leaders communicate long-term investment in employees' professional growth, which reinforces career commitment (Sidik et al., 2024). The more employees develop emotional and moral interest in their profession, the more they will be fulfilled, become stable and content with their career advancement. Previous research (Stinglhamber et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2018; Bacha and Kosa, 2024) illustrates that transformational leadership promotes affective and normative commitment due to the increase of the perceived support, meaning, as well as alignment between the personal aspirations and organizational values. In turn, stronger career commitment has been shown to function as a psychological conduit that translates leadership influence into broader career-related attitudes, including career satisfaction and reduced career-related ambivalence (Singh, 2022). These results are indicative of the fact that commitment is one of the explanatory mechanisms, which links leadership behaviors to subjective career success.

The presence of inconsistent mediation suggests that career commitment is one of the principal pathways through which transformational leadership influences career satisfaction. The findings further indicate that leadership behaviours may not directly translate into positive career evaluations unless they foster stronger occupational attachment and long-term career dedication.

Given the substantial correlation between career commitment and self-efficacy, the indirect effects observed in this study may partially reflect shared psychological processes. A simultaneous estimation of both mediators would provide a more precise assessment of their distinct roles in explaining the relationship between transformational leadership and career satisfaction.

VI. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between transformational leadership and employee career satisfaction, while investigating the mediating roles of self-efficacy and career commitment in explaining this relationship. The findings show that transformational leadership is positively associated with employee career satisfaction. However, the relationship was relatively modest, indicating that leadership behaviours represent only one of several factors shaping employees' evaluations of career progress and fulfilment. More importantly, the findings indicate that the modest relationship between transformational leadership and career satisfaction operates primarily through two interrelated psychological mechanisms. Transformational leadership increases the self-efficacy of employees by boosting their belief in the ability to cope with work and career-related difficulties and enhances career commitment by fostering a deeper sense of identification with and attachment to one's profession. Both mechanisms demonstrated significant indirect effects and operated as important explanatory pathways linking transformational leadership to career satisfaction. The findings further revealed an inconsistent mediation pattern, indicating that transformational leadership contributes to career satisfaction primarily through strengthening employees' self-efficacy and career commitment.

From a theoretical standpoint, the research contributes to existing literature, by emphasizing career satisfaction, instead of mere job satisfaction, where motivational and career-related mediators are incorporated within one explanatory model. In doing so, it responds to calls for more nuanced models that explain how leadership influences long-term career outcomes rather than short-term attitudes alone. Regarding practice, the results indicate that organisations, especially those in the education sector should focus on transformational leadership development and enhance it with career-supportive practices that foster confidence among employees and enhance their career commitment.

An important theoretical contribution of this study is the identification of an inconsistent mediation pattern. While transformational leadership demonstrated a positive total effect on career satisfaction, this effect operated predominantly through self-efficacy and career commitment. The direct effects became negative and statistically non-significant after accounting for the mediators, suggesting that employees' psychological resources and career-related attachments are the primary mechanisms through which transformational leadership influences subjective career success.

The study has a few limitations. First, its cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships, and the use of self-reported measures may introduce common method bias. Second, the focus on teachers within a single national context may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other professions or cultural settings. Another limitation concerns the possibility of common method variance. All variables were measured using self-reported questionnaires administered to the same respondents at a single point in time. Additionally, self-efficacy and career commitment were examined as separate mediators, which may have resulted in overlapping explanatory effects due to their strong correlation. The present study also employed an observed-variable regression approach rather than latent-variable structural equation modelling. Consequently, the analyses did not account for measurement error in the constructs. Lastly, although the sampling strategy ensured representation of different categories of teachers, the present study did not examine whether the hypothesised relationships varied across institutional or demographic subgroups.

Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal or experimental designs, expanding the study to different sectors and countries, and incorporating additional mediating or moderating variables such as perceived employability, meaningful work, organizational career management practices, institutional support, and labour market conditions. The use of parallel mediation analysis or structural equation modelling would also help isolate the unique effects of each mediator. Future studies may benefit from employing structural equation modelling techniques to simultaneously assess measurement quality and structural relationships among the variables. Further, future studies should employ techniques such as Harman's single-factor test, marker variables, common latent factor approaches, or multi-source data collection strategies to assess and minimise this potential concern. Future research may also investigate potential differences according to institution type, educational level, teaching experience, or other relevant characteristics.

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